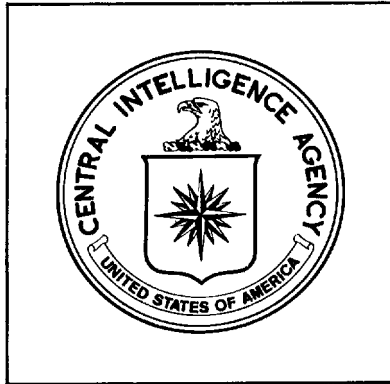


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REGIONAL AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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This publication is prepared by the USSR Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. The views presented are the personal judgments of analysts on significant events or trends in Soviet foreign and domestic affairs. Although the analysis will center on political matters, it will discuss politically relevant economic or strategic trends when appropriate. Differences of opinion will sometimes be aired to present consumers with a range of analytical views. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles or to

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An Assessment of Brezhnev's Position in the Leadership

Note: The following discussion, by the USSR Division's Scholar-in-Residence, offers an alternative view of Brezhnev's current status from the one presented in some recent reporting. The USSR Division invites other contributions on this matter.

Soviet sensitivity to President Carter's criticism of the USSR's performance with respect to human rights, together with Brezhnev's sharp response to that criticism, has raised anew the question of Brezhnev's position in the leadership and, more particularly, the question of how it has been affected by these recent developments. Some observers argue that opposition from powerful figures has made Brezhnev's position unstable and conclude that his resignation from the post of general secretary has become a live issue of Politburo politics. Similar views have frequently been asserted throughout Brezhnev's tenure. In their more extreme formulations, such views have been repeatedly deflated by Brezhnev's continuation in office and by what appears to this writer to be the steady growth of his visible power. One day, no doubt, Brezhnev will leave office, perhaps forced out by his colleagues, but evidence that his departure is imminent, or that his continuation in office is a subject of contention in the top leadership, seems insubstantial.

As assessment of Brezhnev's position which is based solely on the published evidence of the last year (i.e., from the time of the 25th Party Congress a year ago), and which interprets that evidence as simply and plausibly as possible, suggests, instead, that Brezhnev remains the dominant figure in the leadership and that his position is reasonably firm. Certainly, if one looks at the outward signs of power and prestige, it is hard to show that Brezhnev's position has weakened. Thus:

--While Brezhnev's capacity to make top-level appointments remains limited, he did succeed at the time of the 25th Congress in elevating two close proteges: Chernenko, who was promoted to

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Secretary of the Central Committee, and Aliev, who became a candidate member of the Politburo. The three other promotions--Ustinov and Romanov to full membership in the Politburo and Zimyanin to Central Committee Secretary--were not necessarily signs of Brezhnev's power; but neither, on the evidence, did they reflect weakness. At the time of the Congress, he implicitly downgraded Katushev (originally a Brezhnev protege) by placing him after Dolgikh in a rank-order listing of the newly elected non-Politburo secretaries. Katushev appeared to suffer a further demotion when he was recently appointed to the Council of Ministers, and subsequently replaced as head of the Bloc Department of the Central Committee by a member of Brezhnev's personal staff, Rusakov.

--In the past year, Brezhnev's authority in military affairs has been enhanced by his receipt of the country's top military rank, Marshal of the Soviet Union, and by the publicity given his position as chairman of the Defense Council.

--Brezhnev continues to be identified by other Politburo members as the "head" of that body, a cult label that is not warranted by his formal office. Brezhnev is still the chief party spokesman (almost the only one) on questions of national policy and is quoted in almost every *Pravda* editorial. Indeed, Brezhnev's role as party spokesman was in fact upgraded in recent months when, contrary to a longstanding precedent, his report to the Central Committee plenum in October 1976 was published at the time of delivery, and local party organizations formally acknowledged that it set "tasks" that they were supposed to carry out.

But if it is granted that the outward signs suggest that Brezhnev's position is strong, is it not possible, in fact, that there are serious weaknesses in his position which have been concealed from public view? While this possibility cannot be ruled out in view of the great gaps in our knowledge of higher politics in the USSR, the evidence we do have indicates otherwise.

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The Status of Brezhnev's Policies

A possible source of weakness would be major setbacks to Brezhnev's key policies, but it can hardly be said that these are meeting with uniformly poor results. His defense policies have greatly improved the Soviet strategic position in recent years, and the USSR continues to make excellent progress in the development and deployment of intercontinental weaponry. It can also be argued that Soviet foreign policy has achieved notable successes in winning acceptance of the de facto postwar settlement in Europe and has made gains in Southeast Asia and in Africa which compensate for slippage in the Near East. Similarly, it can be contended that the contribution detente has made to the strengthening of Communist parties in Western Europe and thus to weakening NATO has compensated for the problems it has created for the USSR in Eastern Europe. Agricultural policy has not succeeded, but at least the food situation is somewhat better now than it was a year ago. Economic growth continues to decline, and Brezhnev has not addressed himself to deep and longstanding problems in Soviet society, but this seems characteristic of the whole of the top leadership. In any case, in none of these policy arenas can one see in recent developments sudden and visible failures of Brezhnev's policies that might place his position in jeopardy.

What of the problem created for Brezhnev by the US administration's criticism of Soviet performance in the area of human rights? This probably did put Brezhnev on the defensive in the top leadership and required him to shift his ground in policy toward the US, at least in the tactics employed in dealing with the new Carter administration. But if Brezhnev's position in the leadership is reasonably secure, as argued here, this embarrassment to Brezhnev's detente policy would not seriously damage him at home, and there is no evidence to show that it has. Brezhnev has displayed once again his dexterity in adapting to new situations, taking the offensive to turn a possible reverse to his own advantage.

Serious problems do exist for the USSR, of course, and in the long run they may do Brezhnev in, but there are no grounds for believing that a general failure of Brezhnev's policies has seriously weakened his authority

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or for supposing that his resignation is now, or in recent years has been, a subject of controversy in the Politburo.

The Khrushchev Precedent

It might be argued, against the view presented here, that in October 1964, shortly before his sudden removal, Khrushchev's position had also appeared firm. There are, however, three key differences between the situation then and the current one.

- Khrushchev's policies had met with general failure. In foreign policy, the USSR had suffered a sharp setback in its relations with the People's Republic of China and had met with defeat at the hands of the US both in Berlin and in the Cuban missile crisis. In defense policy, Khrushchev had antagonized the military by provoking a large US strategic buildup while allowing Soviet arms programs to make only slow progress. Meanwhile, the 1962 administrative reforms had severely disrupted and angered the party apparatus and disorganized agricultural and industry. As we have seen, Brezhnev's policies do not appear to have suffered comparable failure.
- Khrushchev had made clear his intention to take new personal initiatives in foreign and economic policy which clearly were not welcomed by others in the top leadership. We have no grounds for supposing that Brezhnev is about to undertake major new initiatives, let alone that his Politburo colleagues wish to oppose them. Hence this key motive for removing Khrushchev is not in evidence today.
- Khrushchev was removed by a conspiracy involving, initially, a small number of top leaders who succeeded in winning over the head of the KGB (Semichastny) and his supervisor in the Central Committee apparatus (Shelepin). While we cannot be sure that a new conspiracy might not lead to similar results, most observers--whatever their views on Brezhnev's political strength--would agree that there are grounds for doubting that such a coup is imminent. While the KGB head,

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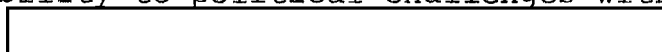
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Andropov, could not be safely relied on to defend Brezhnev's position, Brezhnev has placed three proteges in second-rank positions in the KGB, and this would greatly complicate any efforts of party leaders to win KGB support for a conspiratorial move against him. Moreover, Brezhnev is forewarned by Khrushchev's 1964 example of neglect of this danger. At all events, the argument that Brezhnev's resignation has been a live issue of politics among the top Soviet leaders is based in part on evidence published in the Soviet press. Whether or not Brezhnev's position is in fact a live issue, this evidence would in any case hardly be likely to appear if a conspiracy was afoot.

This is no question that the power Brezhnev has been able to exert from his post of General Secretary of the Central Committee has fluctuated, that it depends on circumstances, including the success of his policies and the sporadic efforts of other Politburo members to limit his authority. A low point may have been reached in early 1975; but if so, Brezhnev made a strong recovery, which enabled him to oust a longstanding opponent, Shelepin. Brezhnev's strengthened position was consolidated at the 25th Party Congress, and subsequently, it would appear, he further strengthened his authority. Particular developments, like President Carter's human rights campaign, may put him on the defensive in the leadership's councils and strongly influence Brezhnev's conduct in office, but of themselves they are not likely to place his office in jeopardy.

Finally, at present, Brezhnev's health appears to have stabilized, and he seems in no imminent danger of suffering serious setbacks. His advanced age and medical history suggest, however, that with the passage of time, the strain of dealing with the serious internal and foreign problems of a superpower may become increasingly burdensome, and this may eventually increase his vulnerability to political challenges within the leadership.



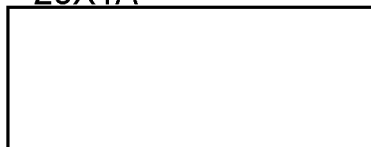
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Katushev, Rusakov Shifted in Shakeup of Bloc Relations Post

Note: The following item [redacted]

[redacted]
is reproduced here because of its significance for the important ongoing question of the reason for Katushev's transfer, as well as the relevance of that transfer for Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe. Other evidence bearing on these points will be published here as it becomes available.

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Recent high-level personnel changes indicate that a significant change has taken place in Soviet leadership arrangements for dealing with the governments and parties of Soviet bloc countries. Central Committee Secretary K. F. Katushev, whose assignment has hitherto involved oversight of relations with Soviet bloc countries, was reported by *Pravda* on 17 March to have been appointed to the posts of USSR deputy premier and Soviet representative to CEMA. On the 18th, Brezhnev's assistant K. V. Rusakov was identified by *Pravda* as heading an unnamed Central Committee section, quite likely the bloc relations section. Further changes will probably occur in the near future, since it is likely that Katushev will have to give up his post on the Secretariat, and Rusakov may be promoted to that body.* Katushev's predecessor in the CEMA position, M. A. Lesechko, has been relieved of his position but remains a deputy premier.

* It is highly unlikely that Katushev could retain his Secretariat position along with his new government positions. Since the end of World War II such dual functions have been exercised only by Stalin (1941-53), Khrushchev (1958-64), Ponomarenko (1950-53), Shelepin (1962-65), and for brief periods, Malenkov (7-14 March 1953) and Shepilov (June-December 1956). Brezhnev briefly combined the posts of Supreme Soviet Presidium Chairman and Central Committee Secretary in 1960 and 1963-64. Ustinov's current status is unclear: while not formally removed as Central Committee secretary since being appointed minister of defense in April 1976, he is no longer identified as secretary.

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In personal terms, the shift appears to represent demotion for Katushev, since as Central Committee secretary he has been part of the leadership collective and distinctly higher in rank than the deputy premiers. Although he has long been identified as a close protege of Brezhnev, he has failed to advance since joining the Secretariat in 1968, and in recent years he has been ranked below V. I. Dolgikh, who became secretary only in 1972.

Although the section now headed by Rusakov has not been specifically identified in the press, it is almost certainly the bloc relations section, since Rusakov participated in a 17 March meeting between Brezhnev and Polish Party Secretary S. Olszowski, and on 22 March also attended Brezhnev's meeting with Cuban party leader Carlos Rafael Rodriguez. Rusakov had headed this section before becoming Brezhnev's assistant in 1972. The transfer clearly coincided with the decision to move Katushev, since as recently as 18 February *Pravda* had identified Rusakov as a Brezhnev assistant. At this stage Rusakov's transfer back to his pre-1972 post would appear to be a slight demotion; however, it may be only a first step toward promotion to the post of Central Committee secretary for bloc relations. [REDACTED]

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PUBLICATION OF INTEREST

Appearances of Soviet Leaders, January-December 1976
(CR 77-10529, February 1977, UNCLASSIFIED)

25X1A This reference aid provides a record of the publicized appearances during 1976 of members of the Politburo and Secretariat, deputy chairmen of the USSR Council of Ministers, and leading officials of the Ministry of Defense. The date, nature, and location of each appearance, and the source of information are provided for each individual. Data on each appearance are arranged alphabetically, and day-to-day activities of the entire group are listed chronologically. Copies may be obtained from

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